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ABSTRACT

In the past decade, increased demands on teachers have often resulted in situations conducive to stress. Teacher stress is defined as the occurrence of perceived negative situations that result in adverse teacher reactions or behaviors. Teacher stress can result from situations in three areas: (1) environmental stressors, encompassing living conditions, job security, scheduling pressures, and federal programs and regulations; (2) interpersonal stressors, resulting from relationships with family, friends, students, parents, and colleagues; and (3) intrapersonal stress, arising from personal or professional feelings of inadequacy, role conflict or ambiguity, lack of influence, or a sense of alienation. The results of stress can be positive or negative. Some stress management techniques are: organizing the environment to prevent unnecessary stress; using teaching teams; establishing personal and professional priorities; and providing for self-renewal. (FG)

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Stress and the Classroom Teacher

by Kevin J. Swick and Patricia E. Hanley

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The Authors

Kevin J. Swick is Professor of Education and Coordinator, Early Childhood Education, and Patricia E. Hanley is Associate Professor, Early Childhood Education, at the University of South Carolina, Columbia. Dr. Swick is also the author of *Disruptive Student Behavior in the Classroom* and *Maintaining Productive Student Behavior,* and the co-author of *Parenting,* published by NEA.

The Consultants

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Harriet Davis, Head Teacher, Children's Center, University of South Carolina, Columbia

Sally Inabinet, first grade teacher, Pierce Terrace Elementary School, Columbia, South Carolina.

INTRODUCTION

Fourth grade teacher Fred Schmidt suffered a nervous breakdown last week. Marian Smythe has an ulcer and 32 first graders to work with daily. Leonard Morelli yells at his eleventh grade history class with the least provocation. Monica LeVon resigned as the middle school geography teacher to become a crew worker for the highway department.

Why do these people exhibit serious physical and/or emotional disorders? Each of them entered teaching with all the excitement and enthusiasm expected of beginning teachers. What went wrong? What transformed their vibrant enthusiasm into irritability, psychosomatic illness, and indifference to or dislike of teaching? Many factors contribute to the development of such negative occurrences. Marian Smythe, for example, may have developed an ulcer because of inadequate classroom space or because of a high percentage of special needs children and inadequate support facilities and personnel.

The purpose of this research report is to assist in the identification of stressors that affect classroom teachers and to recommend some techniques to help teachers cope effectively with stressful situations.

THE NATURE OF STRESS

"Teacher stress . . . has reached epidemic proportions in some school districts" and it is rapidly increasing in others (55).* Teaching has become such a stressful profession that many educators are experiencing physical and/or emotional health problems (44). A teachers' union in the midwest reported that over half of the teachers recently surveyed felt they had suffered physical and/or mental illness as a result of their teaching jobs (62).

Stress itself is neither inherently good nor bad; it depends upon the consequences of an individual's reactions to it (11). The average person is capable of dealing with an occasional crisis. Repeated crises of varying magnitudes can begin to affect the individual adversely, however (58). Stress, then, is defined by a person's affective reactions to a

*Numbers in parentheses appearing in the text refer to the Selected References beginning on page 30.

specific situation. An occurrence or event which may be stress-producing for one person, may appear to another as a challenge or may even go unnoticed as a normally occurring situation.

Many authors and researchers have offered definitions of stress which should be examined at this point. Selye defines it as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand" (52). In other words, an individual subjectively interprets a situation or event and subsequently reacts to it in a given way. Whether or not the situation produces stress is dependent upon the subjective evaluation. The manner in which the same person responds to the stress is highly individualized and may vary from person to person.

According to Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, teacher stress is

> . . . a response syndrome of negative affects (such as anger or depression) usually accompanied by potentially pathogenic physiological changes (such as increased heart rate) resulting from aspects of the teacher's job and mediated by the perception that the demands made upon the teacher constitute a threat to his self-esteem or well-being and by coping mechanisms activated to reduce the perceived threat. (35).

In other words, these authors feel that the individual interprets a situation as being harmful or threatening and reacts to it negatively (35). This behavior is frequently reflected by unhealthy physiological manifestations such as elevated blood pressure, ulcers, and headaches.

Kahn, et. al. define role stress as anything about an organizational position that produces adverse consequences for the individual (32). Again, the stress is determined by an individual's subjective interpretation and negative reaction to an event or situation.

For the purposes of this research report, teacher stress is operationally defined as the occurrence of perceived negative situations that result in adverse teacher responses or behaviors.

FACTORS THAT LEAD TO UNHEALTHY STRESS

In today's rapidly changing society, stress and change are a normal part of living (23). Classroom teachers are not immune to either one. In fact, "change is a major source of stress" for them (60) as they face the need to cope with such concerns as mainstreaming, contract

negotiations, assaults from pupils, alternative family lifestyles, and inflation, to name but a few. Not only must they contend with changes within the school system, they must also contend with others in their personal lives and in society in general.

Many of the changes with which teachers are faced daily become sources of stress. In order to cope effectively with stress the first step is to identify the factors which produce it (55). These factors can be divided into three main areas: environmental, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (28). Each of these three categories can be further subdivided into within-school and out-of-school stressors.

Identifying stressors enables the teacher, or any other person, to determine which ones can be directly controlled and which ones are beyond the individual's control. Only by identifying its sources can the individual begin to plan effective means for eliminating, modifying, or coping with stress.

Environmental Stressors

Stress does not necessarily begin when the tardy bell rings for the school day to start. Just like other people, teachers encounter many potential sources of stress in their homes and neighborhoods, on their routes to and from work, and during their daily routines. As an example, look at some of the out-of-school environmental stressors that fifth grade teacher Marty Smithson encountered before school one Wednesday:

> Marty's three-year-old was ill and ran a high fever during the night.
>
> Marty had to locate someone to stay with the child during the day since the day care center does not accept sick children.
>
> Marty had no time for breakfast, and because of an unusually late departure, she was caught in heavy, slow traffic on the way to school.

A sick child, lack of proper rest, the need to make alternative child care arrangements, and a difficult drive to work were stressors that adversely affected Marty before her arrival at school.

Once they arrive at school, teachers may encounter a myriad of environmental stressors, which Hodge and Marker define as "inanimate impactors in the physical surroundings of the educator" (28). Furthermore, because these stressors seem to be inherent within schools, there is very little that teachers can do to have any direct control over them.

As Sparks noted, the "stage is set for job-related stress when involvement in work is high (as in teaching), but feelings of control or power in the work setting are limited" (56). Thus environmental stressors have the potential for creating a high level of tension and stress in teachers.

Poor classroom working conditions are a continual source of stress (29, 35). Frequently, the classroom is too small and student enrollment is too large (8, 28, 35, 38, 39, 61). A large number of students living and working in a very small, limited space is bound to produce tension and stress. For example, a study by the Tacoma (Washington) Association for Classroom Teachers found that large student enrollment was perceived as a stressor by elementary teachers, although it did not appear to be a problem for secondary teachers (61).

Lack of adequate instructional materials and teaching resources produces stress in classroom teachers (8, 28, 38, 39, 45, 56). Because today's children are accustomed to being bombarded with fast-moving, highly charged action on television programs, it is not easy to hold their attention (18). Teachers therefore need to have access to effective and appropriate instructional materials and teaching resources for planning creative lessons to captivate students' attention.

Stress can result from lack of proper facilities within the school, that is, no indoor play space for inclement weather; poor lighitng and light control; inadequate heating or cooling systems; outdated laboratory equipment and space; inaccessible media facilities; lack of teacher workspace; noise pollution; and room structure (28, 56). Considered singly, or in combination, these stressors can develop into a definite source of aggravation. They can ultimately result in stress because such problems are visible and noticeable. Constant reminders of annoyances can mount until they become so detrimental to the smooth functioning of the classroom that they create stress for both teacher and children.

Job security in teaching is becoming very poor (26). The declining birthrate of the past few years has meant declining enrollments in the public schools. As a result, many teachers are either being laid off or involuntarily transferred to other schools or to different grade levels (26, 55, 57, 61). For teachers who are laid off, stress is double. Not only must they find another job, they may be forced to select another career and/or relocate their family. Such an occurrence is damaging to the teacher's ego as well as to the family's budget. Unfortunately, teaching skills do not allow for easy mobility into another profession without further education or specialized training, requiring both time

and money.

Another environmental stressor pervading the teaching profession is decreasing job mobility (57). Being a classroom teacher prepares one to continue being a classroom teacher. In order to move upward, to be promoted and financially rewarded, one must obtain additional education and advanced degrees, or further certification in different areas, such as administration or supervision. To remain in the classroom as a teacher means that the individual will not rise to a higher rank or be promoted. The most the teacher can expect to receive is an annual incremental salary raise that is usually several percentage points below the annual cost of living increase. Salaries that do not keep pace with the rise in inflation result in frustration and tension for many families in the teaching profession (8, 26).

Educators at every grade level complain about the large number of interruptions during teaching time (28, 36, 59). In a study by Hodge and Marker, teachers ranked class interruptions first in frequency and second in bothersomeness (28). Classroom work is continually being interrupted or rescheduled to accommodate announcements, special assemblies, fund-raising events, athletics, sick children, visiting parents, and other events. Teachers are expected to teach and to maintain concentration and attention on learning in spite of such interruptions. Even though it is not humanly possible to do so, they try. On some days, the number and frequency of interruptions cause such teacher frustration and stress that continued teaching seems useless. And further stress results if the teacher fails to accomplish the goals or tasks set for the lesson or the day.

For many classroom teachers, time pressures and scheduling are a serious source of stress (8, 35, 38, 39, 45). So many tasks must be accomplished during the school day and less and less time is available to complete them. Teachers must be clerks, counselors, imparters of knowledge, public relations specialists, nurses, mothers, and assume many other roles. The paperwork pressure has also become tremendous: forms to complete; reports to write; assessments to compile; notices to compose, duplicate, and send; and curricular materials to develop and write (35, 57, 62).

With a daily schedule limited to approximately six to seven hours, teachers must take attendance and collect various monies, write letters to parents, record students' progress, teach five to six different subjects or classes, attend to the special needs of individual children, meet with parents or other faculty members, prepare teaching materials,

plan the next day's lessons, grade papers, and fill supervisory roles such as cafeteria or bus duty or monitoring study halls (36). They have little, if any, time to stop and relax during the day. Even their biological functions must fit into the bell schedule or wait until school is out (40). When dealing with the vast responsibilities involved with 25 to 30 individual lives, teachers need a few minutes to slow down and gain relief from some of the pressures. But schedules frequently do not allow for this, and if they do, it is only for a very brief moment. According to Sparks, many teachers report that they frequently or always leave school physically and/or emotionally exhausted from the stress encountered during the day (56).

Another source of environmental stress relates to federal programs and regulations (26). Often, such programs are thrust upon classroom teachers without adequate preparation to familiarize them with the program goals and purposes. Yet teachers are expected to implement them in a quality manner. Additionally, there are many federal regulations that impinge upon the public schools, and the classroom teacher is ultimately accountable for their implementation. A recent example is the implementation of Public Law 94-142 relating to mainstreaming handicapped children in regular classrooms. Many teachers are unprepared to deal with the unique needs of these special children (3). They may not understand the child's problem and they may not have had appropriate training to enable them to plan effectively for teaching the child. Although local school systems are required to comply with federal regulations, they may not be financially or environmentally prepared to do so. However, the burden for directly implementing the federal mandate falls upon the classroom teacher who, as a result, may become frustrated and upset and thus subject to tension and stress.

According to Dillon, proliferating curricular demands can be very stressful (12). Each day elementary teachers teach five to seven basic subjects and secondary programs include a similar number of obligatory subjects. Many states and school districts are requiring that additional courses such as nutrition education, sex education, consumer information, and auto mechanics be incorporated into the curriculum. The officials who mandate these extra requirements are confident that such topics are essential and should be included in the curriculum. It is the classroom teacher, however, who must reorganize an already full schedule in a day filled with annoying interruptions to include these additional curricular offerings. Time is limited; something must give.

The teacher is pressured to manage and, again, may be put under undue stress.

Classroom teachers are not strangers to environmental stressors. Each one has been confronted with many of them. The problem seems to be that "when stress levels are high in two or more areas, this may create additional stress . . ." (28). And perhaps the most frustrating aspect of environmental stressors is that they are in school systems to stay and often there is nothing the teacher can do to change them.

Interpersonal Stressors

Situations involving interpersonal communication and human relations skills may be subject to stress. In their personal lives, teachers interact with their families and friends, with merchants, doctors, and strangers on the streets, in stores and at social gatherings. The quality of these relationships can affect the teacher's out-of-school interpersonal stress.

> Before James Coleman leaves for his high school, he has a pleasant breakfast with his family. He helps dress the children for school and wishes his family a good day. In the car pool he has positive comments to offer each of the other riders, and he enters school with a kind word for the custodian.

No interpersonal stressors are impinging upon Mr. Coleman's life from outside school today. However, look at another situation:

> Joe Mayes had an argument with his teenage daughter during breakfast, his wife sided against him, his car pool was late, he left his keys at home, and the custodian failed to unlock his classroom as usual.

Mr. Mayes's day is already interrupted by out-of-school interpersonal stressors. Any in-school interpersonal stressors will confront an already tense and anxious teacher.

Hodge and Marker define interpersonal stressors as those situations that involve interactions with one or more individuals in the school setting:

> . . . teacher relationships with other colleagues, administrators, clerical staff and students;
>
> . . . those stresses involved when attempting to communicate with students of varying needs, interests and abilities;
>
> . . . reacting to innattentive students;

. . . discussing discipline procedures with pupils;

. . . and responding to students' personal and academic problems. (28)

All these situations involve interpersonal communication and human relations skills requiring the teacher to be a good listener and to be responsive to others (28).

Teachers are concerned about whether their students like them; they also feel compelled to try to reciprocate and like their students. Since discipline and behavior problems are interpersonal stressors, it seems obvious that it may not always be easy for a teacher to like all students (7, 8, 15, 26, 35, 36, 38, 39, 45, 48, 61). If students assault a teacher physically or verbally, for example, it is extremely difficult for the teacher to remain calm and understanding (56, 57, 61, 62).

Discipline and classroom control are a major source of interpersonal stress for teachers at all grade levels. In many instances, they are dealing with students from varied backgrounds, some of whom have had few personal constraints placed on them before their school experience (12). Although the public, parents, and administrators demand educational accountability, educators have to contend with many discipline problems which take time away from teaching (56). Some children, for example, have emotional difficulties, and some have developed a negative attitude toward learning and school (26, 36, 45, 55). When pupil misbehavior interrupts and/or interferes with the teaching-learning process, pressure and tension result, thus adding to teacher stress.

Leffingwell suggests two social factors related to classroom control and discipline over which teachers have little control:

1. Parents' unrealistic expectations of their child's ability.
2. Mores and standards of the peer group. (40)

According to Bardo, teachers suffer thousands of daily assaults (2). Not all these assaults are physical, nor do they come solely from students. Parents abuse teachers by cursing them; by expecting them to control children they have failed to discipline and control; by expecting them to accomplish the impossible academically with their children; by expecting public education to solve all social problems (38, 39, 56).

Administrators and supervisors pose threatening situations for classroom teachers. They may or may not communicate effectively to teachers regarding performance, job expectations, school policies, and

staff changes (23, 26, 29, 61, 62, 63). Leffingwell notes that "trying to meet the expected needs of too many people can lead to feelings of frustration and a general sense of helplessness" (40). Teachers who try to be all things to all people are trying to achieve the impossible. In so doing, they place themselves in a very stressful lifestyle.

Colleagues can also be a source of stress. They may try to impose their own philosophies and techniques upon others, especially a beginning teacher. Consider the following experience of a beginning sixth grade teacher.

> Every day at 10:15 an experienced colleague came into Ms. H's classroom to see if her television worked. Mrs. B would turn on the set, adjust it to the educational television program on social studies, and then leave the room. After three days of this, Ms. H's students explained that, although it was math period, Mrs. B expected the class to watch social studies. Ms. H and Mrs. B had a long and fruitless discussion about the situation but no amenable solution seemed possible. Ms. H was under a great deal of pressure to conform to Mrs. B's wishes on the one hand and to meet the students' academic needs on the other.
>
> On the fourth day when Mrs. B arrived to turn on the television, Ms. H was walking carefully and slowly around the room, looking under and inside everything. When Mrs. B asked the reason, Ms. H reported that the class snake was missing! Mrs. B made a very fast exit, forgetting to turn on the television. Ms. H's tension and stress were greatly relieved, whereas Mrs. B's more than likely increased.

Sometimes staff changes occurring in the middle of a school year may be stressors (60). For example, a teacher may leave or a principal may be absent because of illness. Temporarily, other classroom teachers may be called upon to orient the new teacher or they may have to learn to deal with the policies of a different administrator. Such changes can produce tension and result in added stress.

Many teachers belong to one or more professional organizations or educators' unions. During periods of contract negotiations, the relationship between the organization spokesperson and the school administration may become quite strained over matters of salary, rights, and responsibilities (60). This, in turn, has an effect upon teachers who do not know if they will receive a salary increase and who may feel that the school administration, resisting the negotiations, is dissatisfied with or unappreciative of their teaching efforts. The negotiation process, whose main components include argument and disagreement, may therefore produce stress as teachers discuss the situation with peers, administrators, or parents of students.

With the implementation of mainstreaming in the public schools, children with special needs may be in the regular classroom all or part of the day. The conscientious teacher will make every effort to meet the needs of the handicapped child as well as of the other 25 to 30 children in the classroom. For example:

> Mrs. D is an enthusiastic and effective kindergarten teacher with 30 children in both the morning and afternoon sessions. In her morning session a child with spinal bifida is confined to a wheelchair. Because of the complexities of the child's physical situation, she has no bowel or bladder control and goes to the bathroom in her clothes. The district has always provided Mrs. D with a kindergarten aide, but a policy prohibits the aide from cleaning up the child after these accidents, which may occur twice in a morning. At such times, Mrs. D therefore must lift the child out of the wheelchair; undress, clean, and redress her; lift her back into the wheelchair and at the same time try to comfort the child's embarrassed feelings. Also, remember that there are 29 other children in the classroom needing attention.
>
> The parents will not permit the child to wear diapers; Mrs. D can therefore count on at least one accident every day. Additionally, Mrs. D is concerned about the child's reaction to these accidents, which do not go unnoticed by the other children in the room. Mrs. D also has to cope with the fact that she may often be in the middle of a lesson when the accidents occur.
>
> The principal has not been supportive or sympathetic. Although Mrs. D feels that she is entitled to assistance, however, she does not have the option of overstepping the principal. Her time is taken away from the other children in the kindergarten, and there is much strain on the parent-teacher and the teacher-administrator relationships over the matter. Because of the stress produced by this situation, Mrs. D is very frustrated and physically drained.

Classroom teachers are continually interacting with a variety of personalities – students, colleagues, administrators, parents. They must be constantly attuned to the ways they communicate with and are perceived by other people. Teachers are perpetually expected to be diplomats, mediators, counselors, disciplinarians, and imparters of knowledge. These are not easy roles and they sometimes conflict with one another. Communication is bound to break down occasionally, and anxiety and upset may result. Thus interpersonal stressors can place a great deal of strain and pressure upon relationships.

Intrapersonal Stressors

According to Hodge and Marker, intrapersonal stressors relate to the teacher's education, classroom skills, self-concept, and motivation (28). These stressors affect each teacher individually and result from self-evaluation and feelings of personal adequacy. These authors report that "feelings of intrapersonal inadequacy can be the most serious stress-inducing factor for an educator, resulting in the loss of self-confidence in teaching."

Out-of-school intrapersonal stress may arise with feelings of inadequacy about one's personal life. If teachers feel unsure about their capabilities or functioning as a spouse or parent, tension and stress have a grasp on them before they arrive at school. If a teacher's family life is unhappy or disorganized due to temporary or long-lasting familial changes, that teacher has the extra disadvantage of out-of-school stress to cope with in addition to whatever may be waiting at school.

Several intrapersonal stressors apply equally to difficulties in out-of-school and in-school life: namely, lack of planning, inordinate sense of responsibility, powerlessness, inability to set priorities, procrastination, working against time pressures, poor time-management skills, and unreasonably high expectations for oneself and for others (21, 23, 37, 55, 56, 57, 59). Furthermore, concealing emotions and denying real feelings in an effort to rationalize away feelings of tension utilize much time and energy better spent more constructively instead of being spent to create more stress (27, 40). Additional intrapersonal stressors that teachers may encounter in school or out are the following: lack of self-fulfillment and unmet ego needs; high need for achievement; feeling unappreciated; doubting personal (and professional) competence; and poor self-image (23, 59). Teachers who experience any of these stressors might be well advised to try to identify whether they are applicable to their homelife, to their professional life, or both.

One of the more prominent intrapersonal stressors affecting teachers at school is role conflict or role ambiguity (14, 29, 36, 56, 57). This stressor results from a lack of clearly delineated job descriptions for most classroom teachers. Everyone seems to have a unique perception of what a teacher is expected to be and to do. Among the many role expectations are imparter of information, disciplinarian, evaluator, in-service participant, clerk and participant at professional meetings (16). Teachers are expected to be part executive to supervise and direct, part counselor to support and advise, and part support person to clerk and

housekeep. Edgerton observes that "not only do extraneous duties compete for the teacher's time . . . , but more important, many of the roles assigned to teachers are mutually exclusive. They are inherently contradictory, continually in conflict" (16). The high cost of attempts to be all things to all people may be a heavy dose of guilt, frustration, and tension, with stress as the end result (34, 56). Along this same line, many teachers have a difficult time accepting that there are limits to what they can do for a child in a school setting (38). They expect to be able to overcome or override all the diversities that students have faced in the past or in their home lives. Through these unrealistic expectations they create pressure and frustration for themselves.

Many classroom teachers feel they have little or no influence in curriculum or policy decisions affecting the school (29, 56). They feel that directives are frequently handed down from the central administration without respect for input from classroom teachers—those who are expected to implement the directives. In one rather unusual case, a teacher reported that she was chosen as part of a districtwide committee to evaluate and recommend adoption of a particular textbook series. This is what happened:

> Everyone in the district was astounded to hear that classroom teachers were going to be involved in making a critical decision. At the second-to-the-last scheduled committee meeting, some information was requested from the district office relative to the textbook series. Accidentally included in the information file was a copy of the school district's purchase order for the textbook series, dated prior to the organization of the teacher committee.

The teachers were extremely upset because they had worked earnestly and diligently in good faith on a task only to discover it was to no avail. The decision was made not only without their input, but it was made weeks before. They were angry, discouraged, and totally frustrated by such a ruse.

Within a single classroom, however, teachers do have opportunities to make decisions as to which teaching materials and procedures to use (26, 45). Here they must concern themselves with whether or not they made the best choices: Were the materials appropriate for the students? Was the teaching adequate? Were enough materials presented? Did the teacher have sufficient knowledge to teach the lesson (8, 48)? Teacher self-evaluation is a continuing necessity in order to improve and upgrade the educational system. However, when it becomes self-doubting, then intrapersonal stress may result.

Many classroom teachers begin to feel isolated and alone, cut off from peers and from decisionmaking (62). They leave school tired and fatigued and carry home so much work that they do not have time to relax. Not having free time to relax and unwind from job stresses is itself stress-producing (40). Teachers must learn to be realistic about the problems and tensions they experience and realize that they are not caused solely by their own personal weaknesses or inadequacies (16). They need to become good observers and to be constructively critical of daily classroom occurrences so that they may identify the sources of problems and tensions accurately and realistically, and learn to be teacher- or self-advocates.

According to Coates and Thoresen, the sources of stress experienced by classroom teachers are real, prevalent, and potentially harmful to both teachers and students (8). Furthermore, Kyriacou and Sutcliffe report that the extent to which demands upon teachers result in stress depends directly upon the degree to which the teacher is already experiencing stress in other aspects of personal life (36). As stated earlier by Hodge and Marker, when stress levels are high in two or more areas of one's life, additional stress may be created (28). The time and energy spent under stress could be better used as a source of energy for improving the educational system (63).

STRESS AND ITS EFFECTS ON DIFFERENT TEACHERS

Research findings indicate that each individual deals with stressful situations in different ways. Considerable information is available, however, regarding the positive and negative effects of stress on classroom teachers as well as on other helping professionals (35, 41). First, a cautionary note is in order: the material presented in this section is subject to individual teacher situations.

Negative Effects

In the areas of psychology and sociopsychology the literature is replete with studies pointing to a variety of negative stressors, which in turn affect teachers in negative ways. Before examining these stress situations, it may be beneficial to indicate that the existing psychological and physiological state of the classroom teacher is significant in

terms of how any form of stress is handled.

To foster a better understanding of this point, consider the case of Mrs. Brunon.

> Clara Brunon has been teaching third grade for sixteen years. "Clare," as her friends know her, was considered a good teacher until two years ago, when several things happened to disrupt her "usually fine teaching performance." First, her own health took a turn for the worse; then her husband had heart trouble; and to make things worse, her new principal disagrees with Clare on her classroom management.
>
> This combination of stressors has already affected the way Clara Brunon teaches. For the past two years she has been unable to thoughtfully plan her week of activities for the children. Thus many discipline problems have evolved. Her once exciting and well-organized classroom now appears in disarray. Most important, the zealous Clare now appears to drag herself into the classroom each day.

It is clear that Clara Brunon is psychologically and physically unable to deal with any more stress than she already has. It is also evident that, under less stress in the past, Clara performed very effectively. Research indicates that most individuals have a level of stress beyond which they become dysfunctional (9, 15). This raises another issue: the way in which people deal with a stressful situation has a significant influence on how it affects their behavior. For example, if Clara had gone to her principal and requested a year's leave because of her husband's illness, she probably would have been able to sort things out in her "life-space" and thus manage them in a constructive manner.

Before identifying the negative effects of certain stressors on teachers, it may help to explain two contextual points related to minimizing these effects. One important research finding related to teacher behavior holds that when they experience a *supportive environment*, teachers deal more effectively under various conditions (49). For example, when Mr. Watson was facing difficult times in his personal life, his colleagues joined together to cover some of his assignments and were reassuring to him in their interpersonal contacts. A hostile setting only increases the likelihood of negative reactions to even minor stressors. Another important research finding indicates that teachers (and other helping professionals) can benefit from *stress management* courses and workshops (25). Knowing one's personal stress limit and learning how to deal with different stressors has had a positive effect on the lives of many teachers.

The following negative effects of stress on teacher behaviors are based

on the information presented thus far in this section. These effects have been categorized into two areas: *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal.* It should be noted that while these effects are listed in isolation from each other, they often occur in clusters and are interrelated.

Intrapersonal Effects

The following five negative effects of stress on the intrapersonal functioning of classroom teachers have been substantiated by several research studies (35, 48):

1. Increase in physiological problems such as high blood pressure and drastic changes in dietary habits.
2. Disruption of psychological functioning which may be exhibited in chronic depression and/or excessive nervousness.
3. Development of a personal sense of helplessness and feelings of inferiority.
4. Existence of significant loss of both physical and psychological levels of energy. Actually this is a transference of energy from usual usage to trying to deal with anxiety.
5. Formation of psychosomatic illnesses which seem real but actually stem from the inability to deal with reality.

Studies also indicate that, in some cases, these effects may be causal factors. For example, high blood pressure can bring on stress situations which normally would not be perceived as stressful by the teacher. Thus, there is a transactional relationship between stress causes and stress effects. Similarly, there is also an interactive relationship between intrapersonal and interpersonal effects of stressors on teacher behaviors.

Interpersonal Effects

The major negative interpersonal effects are identified as follows (13, 30, 48):

1. Development (or increases) of a feeling of general social inadequacy.
2. Decrease in the ability to deal with classroom discipline problems. For example, what used to be viewed as normal, developmental student behavior is now viewed as a personal vendetta against the teacher.
3. Erratic teaching in place of what used to be a pattern of stability.

4. Conflicts with colleagues over even minor disagreements.
5. Formation of a constant "blaming" behavior pattern. Whereas the teacher who has control of things may see her/his part in a problem, high-stress teachers tend to see the problem as one caused by others.
6. Decrease in the personal-social life.

The interpersonal lives of teachers under negative stress conditions tend to gravitate toward a level of social ineffectiveness that affects both their personal and teaching selves. In turn, a cycle of failure begins which, if left unattended, can lead only to a total breakdown of the teacher's human functioning.

Positive Effects

Stress is usually identified with negative behavioral outcomes. Typically, when people think of stressful situations they automatically conjure up images of deadlines to be met, unpleasant duties to perform, and uncomfortable situations with which to deal. According to research, however, stress can have both negative and positive outcomes (42). Indeed, many great leaders (including many fine teachers) have acquired their status because of their positive responses to stressors. The following lists describe some of the positive effects of stress on teacher behaviors.

Intrapersonal Effects

Among the positive intrapersonal effects are the following (19, 27):

1. Development of a context for an improved teaching self-concept. People who are able to solve problems under pressure usually develop a positive sense of their own human potential.
2. Formation of the basis for growth situations. For example, teachers who deal effectively with classroom management situations usually transfer this problem-solving skill to other areas of life.
3. Development of preventive skills in anticipating how to deal with an oncoming stressor. For example, a teacher who has successfully dealt with an irate parent can utilize the experience to prevent or minimize the impact of such events in the future.
4. Formation of a more effective teaching style. Stress can force one to examine one's approach to teaching and may lead in the direction of developing a more useful style.

5. Development of improved physiological well-being. People who learn to manage stress in a positive way are likely to experience an increased physical well-being.

The nature of stress is such that in many cases the individual's reaction plays the major role in determining whether the ultimate outcome is negative or positive. While certain shock stressors, such as the death of a spouse, will cause negative responses in all people, many human stress situations are manageable. This becomes evident when positive effects of stress on interpersonal relations are explored.

Interpersonal Effects

Among the positive interpersonal effects are the following (9, 48):

1. Improvement in social abilities with children and teachers. Children respond positively to teachers who exhibit stress management skills. Teachers look toward the functioning teacher as a leader and problem solver.
2. Creation of a cycle of positive behaviors among teachers. This enables teachers to develop leadership skills for use in their professional and personal lives.
3. Potential for developing team approaches to handling stress, such as the formation of teacher support networks. This teaming provides the basis for developing an improved social climate in the school-community setting.
4. Establishment of a framework where children (and their parents) can model positive stress management skills as exhibited by the teacher.
5. Development of situations where many stressors can be eliminated and others prevented or minimized. People who are effective in dealing with stress usually develop skills for altering their interpersonal setting to the end of reducing the possibilities for the occurrence of unhealthy stress.

Stress itself is a neutral event until acted upon or reacted to by the individuals involved. For example, John, upset upon receiving a failing grade in social studies, responds by blaming Mrs. Wiggins, his teacher. Mrs. Wiggins and John leave the classroom to discuss the situation. Mrs. Wiggins begins by pointing out that John is very capable and could do good work. By utilizing a problem-solving approach she is able to use this stress situation to John's advantage and to sharpen her own classroom management skills.

As explored in this section of the report, research indicates that

negative effects of stress usually occur when teachers are unable to handle their intrapersonal and interpersonal lives in an effective manner. Positive responses to stress occur among those who have a supportive environment in which to work and who have developed skills for identifying and managing stressors in productive ways.

STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

The emphasis on preparing teachers in cognitive modes at the expense of their affective development has contributed to the inability of many teachers to handle stress in constructive ways. Recent research indicates that a majority of teachers use predominantly negative behaviors in attempting to correct student behaviors and/or manage the classroom environment (57, 59). Considering the *setting* in the schools, the teacher behaviors noted were not surprising, according to these reports. Thus, a major need exists for teachers (and those who work with teachers) to develop techniques for managing the affective aspects of their teaching-learning situations (63). The material discussed in this section focuses on stress management techniques that classroom teachers can use to better handle the personal and professional facets of their lives.

Knowing Thyself

According to research, teachers who know themselves are more capable of dealing with stressors than those who are unsure of who they are and of how they function (38, 39). For example, the teacher who has an understanding of his/her stress limits and who can discern stress-causing factors in the classroom is more likely to deal with these situations positively than is the teacher who is overwhelmed by the personal and social events surrounding him/her. Teachers can benefit from asking such questions as the following:

1. Do I have a special time when I can get in touch with my personal feelings?
2. Do I have a good understanding of the way I relate to people and how these relationships affect my behavior?
3. Have I examined my teaching self for the purposes of developing methods for coping with stress?

A personal sense of self is essential to the development of a teaching style that includes mechanisms for dealing effectively with stress.

Stress Management as a Workable Concept

While many teachers accept the validity and value of classroom management procedures, they are less knowledgeable about the concepts involved in stress management. The development of a knowledge base of stress management techniques is essential to applying them to classroom and related personal or professional situations. For example, research reports that a teacher's ability to recognize signals indicating the emergence of high levels of stress is a key factor in dealing with stressors once they occur (57).

Sparks recommends that teacher centers offer workshops in preventing and managing stress in educational settings (55). There are four primary goals for the establishment and implementation of such workshops. First, meeting together with others to discuss feelings and concerns helps reduce the isolation that so many teachers feel. They discover that they are not alone in their feelings and concerns. It is also helpful to clarify that one's feelings are indeed real (40). As a matter of fact, many teachers are troubled by common problems and concerns.

The second goal is to attempt to identify the sources of job-related stress (55). In order to plan effective strategies for dealing with stress, one must make an effort to determine what seems to be causing the stress (22). In addition to labeling the sources of stress, Leffingwell further suggests the need to identify the effects of stressors on the individual (24, 40). The third goal established by Sparks is to help teachers identify and focus upon their professional strengths and successful work experiences in order to increase their satisfaction with teaching (55). This goal attempts to aid teachers in developing a positive outlook with respect to their strengths and successes; it helps them learn to appreciate what they have (59).

The fourth goal of a stress management workshop is to develop a plan for preventing or alleviating the stress (25, 55). Since a great deal of energy is required to respond to stress, teachers should—

1. Decide whether to respond to a particular stressor.
2. Determine how much energy to expend on the stressor.
3. Arrange to balance between stressful periods and relaxing ones. (60)

The primary objective of stress management is to assist teachers both in focusing on those stressors they can control and in developing effective problem-solving behaviors for coping with them (40).

Various components of stress management are applicable in developing effective teacher behavior. Many of these components are based on the idea that when stress is dealt with in a logical manner, it can become a meaningful part of the teaching-learning process. Although it would be impossible to eliminate all stressors, teachers can teach themselves new coping mechanisms to relieve or modify the effects of stress (62). For example, the use of quiet times during the school day not only enables the children to integrate their feelings but also allows the teachers time to reduce their level of activity—thus decreasing the possibilities of stress-related occurrences. Another example, the application of time management strategies, is simply the organizing of one's life in a manner that maximizes the use of positive situations to channel stress into productive outcomes.

Two key factors are essential to effective time management strategies. First, avoid procrastinating. Always be prepared to manage the expected lessons and routines in the classroom. One never knows when something will go awry, but without planning for the expected, the slightest deviation from normal can be very upsetting and threatening. A case in point: a laboratory school teacher instructed her student teachers to consider a flat tire or mechanical difficulties with the bus as normal occurrences on a field trip; therefore she routinely required that they plan activities to occupy the children for two to three hours while any needed repairs might be made.

Second, remember that teachers can do only so much. They must realize this and request extra help, such as an aide to do much of the clerical work or to initiate a parent volunteer program to acquire extra help in the classroom with a variety of activities.

The remaining topics in this section focus on specific stress management techniques.

Organizing the Environment to Prevent Unhealthy Stress

Two of the most commonly cited causes of negative stressors (stress which seems to negatively impact on teacher behaviors) are as follows: (1) environmentally related conditions within the workplace and (2) environmentally related conditions outside the workplace (28). It is

worth noting that these same factors are cited by teachers as causal factors in the disruptive behavior of students. Thus, proper organization of the physical and social environment of both professional and non-professional situations can have a positive effect in preventing the costly fallout stressors often have on both teachers and students.

Specific organizational strategies include the following:

1. Establish a classroom setting with which teacher and students can identify and in which they can take pride. Teachers who have no "place" in the classroom or school will eventually be ineffective as teachers and as learners. This premise also holds true for students. Teachers should apply this same practice in their out-of-school situations, especially the home. The teacher who leaves school to confront chaos in her/his personal life will be constantly facing the exhaustion battle.
2. Examine the physical and social context of the teaching and/or personal situation to identify factors which may be contributing to the emergence of unhealthy stress predicaments. For example, lack of time to regroup during the day is a causal factor. If this is the case, plans can be developed to alleviate the situation through the use of parent/citizen volunteers, team planning with other teachers, better scheduling of the day's activities, or the development of other solutions.
3. Plan and design a pleasant, challenging, and rewarding professional and personal context. Teachers and students respond negatively to stifling environments. Boredom itself can be a factor in creating unnecessary stressors. An invitational teaching environment extends itself to the participation of students and teachers alike in meaningful learning (49). Well-organized environments are usually typified by their order, flexible arrangements, attractiveness, respect for people, teacher/student leadership, and many other positive traits.
4. Isolate obvious sources of tension that lead to the severe disruption of effective behavior patterns. For example, a teacher may find his/her personal life filled with too many commitments in terms of community activities. In such a case, the individual should examine his/her schedule and make appropriate adjustments to reduce sources of undue tension and stress. Many teachers suffer from an overload of demands in their personal and professional lives. Effective time and task management can eliminate this source of tension.
5. Allocate professional and personal time and energy for involvement in stress management workshops and personal development activities. Abraham Maslow's classical work in the area of human self-actualization clearly indicates that growth-oriented

people use stress as a mechanism for creative problem solving. These same people, says Maslow, utilize human development opportunities to continually refine their lifestyles (42).

Stress is inherent in all facets of life. By its very nature, teaching involves many stress-inducing situations. In fact, along with air traffic control and surgery, teaching is rated as one of the most stressful professions (30). The acceptance of tension as part of the human context is a first step toward handling it in a functional way. Thus, stress can be used as a vehicle for enabling teachers and students to practice problem-solving skills. For example, a common stressor among middle school students is boredom with the usual school routine. Through planning and development of special interest courses, this stressor can be used to create a more interesting learning climate. Boredom is also a problem some educators face after teaching for many years. Through the use of careful planning, teachers can alleviate this stressor by such projects as exchange teaching, minisabbaticals, and other activities that stimulate personal and professional renewal. Research reports that stress, when properly handled, can be the vehicle for improving the personal and professional lives of many teachers (47).

The Teaching Team as a Resource in Handling Stressors

One of the most effective but unused resources in handling stress is the teaching team. Research on human behavior clearly indicates that teachers who function in supportive environments usually deal with stress in positive modes (62). Stress management literature emphasizes the value of team development in confronting the demands of teaching. Some of the benefits of this technique include the following: (1) sharing of ideas on how to deal with stress, (2) development of team teaching which reduces negative effects of stress, (3) formation of human support systems that enhance teacher self-concepts, and (4) development of teacher centers where personal and professional sharing can take place on a continuous basis. Team approaches can be initiated through faculty planning groups and can take many forms including study groups, in-service education teams, and team planning groups.

Everyone needs some "stroking" now and then. Styles and Cavanaugh suggest that teachers should be observant of when they need and deserve praise; they need to learn to applaud themselves honestly

and to demonstrate an appreciation for another person's efforts (59). The mental health of teachers and children will improve when the members of the school team help one another in actualizing their talents (26, 50).

Establishing Personal and Professional Priorities

One of the major causes of the negative effects of stressors on teachers is overload. Overload occurs when the individual has accepted too many tasks for the time allowed to accomplish them. If left unchecked, this situation can lead to burnout. According to research, when teachers have established their priorities and organized their personal and professional lives around them, they function effectively—even under strenuous circumstances (11). Questions such as the following can be helpful to teachers in planning and organizing their objectives.

1. Have you identified the important tasks that you want to accomplish? Have you prioritized them?
2. Have you examined alternative ways to accomplish these objectives? Are you planning too many activities for the time you have to accomplish them?
3. Have you organized a time schedule for accomplishing your objectives? If so, is the schedule reasonable in terms of actually doing an effective job?
4. Have you established a resource team to help you accomplish these objectives?
5. How will you evaluate your effectiveness in accomplishing the objectives?

The development of priorities for personal and professional life and the organization of a system to carry out the plans can be very helpful to teachers in their efforts to deal with stress.

Maintaining Sound Physical and Mental Health

A major research finding related to stress and the classroom is that the health of the individual is the key factor in the management of stressors. The maintenance of good health provides the teacher with more energy to use in dealing with stress as well as with daily routines

(13). Like any human element, health must be managed or it will take second place to other concerns. By providing time for daily exercise, adequate rest, good nutrition, and recreational endeavors, the classroom teacher can become equipped with the personal tools essential for dealing with tension in productive ways.

Providing for Self-Renewal

Teachers are people, too! This phrase is most appropriate when the demands upon teachers are considered. A priority concern of all teachers should be continuous self-development. An unfortunate premise accepted in our culture is that we are "complete" when we finish a certain goal. Yet, research indicates that the human need for continuous development is essential to healthful living (43). Self-renewal for the teacher can be accomplished in several ways, including the use of courses of study, in-service education workshops, travel, professional visits to other schools, conferences, hobbies, and a myriad of other activities. The important thing is that each one *plan* activities to enrich and broaden her/himself as a person and as a teacher. Landsman suggests that educators should do something everyday to pamper themselves (38). Kindness and consideration toward their own personal needs enable teachers to meet the needs of their students more effectively. The teacher who has no other life but teaching is ill-equipped to deal with in-school stressors.

Probably one of the most exhilarating ways to achieve self-renewal is to retain a sense of humor in the face of what may appear to be insurmountable adversity. Classroom teachers are continually confronted with so many responsibilities that they can easily become overserious and view most situations too solemnly. Ms. Patrick, a first grade teacher, found herself in this position one day:

> At the end of a most trying morning, Ms. Patrick was eating lunch at the teachers' table while her aide supervised the children's lunch. After only three minutes' respite from the trials and tribulations of the morning, Ms. Patrick was interrupted by a frantic aide. Six-year-old Timmy had done something terrible at the table. Although the aide was unable to articulate it clearly, the difficulty had something to do with toileting.
>
> Ms. Patrick's first impulse was to be annoyed with the aide for disturbing her and failing to deal with the situation, and, second, to give Timmy a good scolding for misbehavior. When she arrived at the table, however, she discovered a rather forlorn-looking Timmy,

repeating these words: "I really had to go bad, teacher." In one hand he was holding a sandwich and in the other hand, under the table, he held a plastic sandwich bag full of urine.

When Ms. Patrick realized how alarmed she had allowed herself to become and how creative and coordinated Timmy had been, she had no choice but to laugh at the incident. What a waste of energy to become stressed at the situation! A sense of humor, well used, eliminated stress for both teacher and student.

CONCLUDING COMMENT

During the past decade the teaching profession has experienced many changes, including increased community pressure for more services and accountability, the mainstreaming of children with special needs into the regular classroom, increased professional demands, as well as more parent/citizen involvement. While these developments are certainly positive, the increased demands on teachers have often resulted in negative stress situations. In a similar manner, many teachers have confronted a variety of personal pressures which are directly or indirectly a result of changes in their professional lives. Dwindling teacher salaries (when adjusted for inflation), more stringent tenure criteria, and increased demands on teacher time have created havoc with the personal dimension of their lives. Thus it is no surprise that teachers are concerned with the stress they live with and its effects on them personally and professionally.

Stress can be used as a positive force in the classroom when teachers are in good physical and mental health. Many stressors that could result in negative consequences can be prevented and/or minimized when teachers organize themselves and their classroom effectively in terms of the learning process. The use of such strategies as personal development, setting priorities, and team teaching situations can, if used properly, provide needed tools for dealing with stress in preventive and coping modes. There is also a need to learn to accept challenges and to cope. "Constantly coping with the challenging problems of relating to people and encouraging the growth of individual students can keep the teacher's stress mechanism in good shape" (59).

The development and use of stress management workshops is one method some educators find helpful in attempting to manage the stress they confront in teaching. In addition to workshops, many other

options exist, including the use of peer group counseling, individual self-renewal activities, time management courses, and other positive approaches to handling stress. Beyond these teacher-initiated efforts, however, there is also the need for a school-community support system that enables teachers to carry out their duties more effectively.

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